

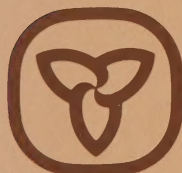
CORRECTIONS ONTARIO:

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Community Resource Centres



As Rick B. walks down the quiet residential street toward the community resource centre (CRC) where he is staying, he is feeling better than he has felt in months. He has just had a successful job interview and is to start work as a construction worker. He has seven months of his prison sentence left to serve, and he is glad he will spend them in the CRC, and perhaps in the community if he is released on parole, rather than in the correctional centre.



Ontario

Ministry of
Correctional
Services

Honourable Nicholas G. Leluk
Minister
George R. Podrebarac
Deputy Minister

SENTENCED

Rick B. quit high school five years ago, when he was 16 years old, and spent too many afternoons in bars drinking. He drifted in and out of jobs.

When he appeared in court to face his third charge of impaired driving, the judge sentenced Rick to nine months in prison.

While he was impaired, Rick had lost control of the car and had smashed into an elementary school fence. He did not have to be reminded that he was lucky there had not been children around.

Shortly after his appearance in court, Rick was transferred from the local jail to a correctional centre where most inmates serving sentences longer than three months but less than two years are sent.

Rick was assigned to the institution's kitchen, which helped to pass the time. He attended Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings once each week in the institution because he was determined to break his drinking habit.

OBTAINING A TEMPORARY ABSENCE PASS

At the end of his first month Rick asked to see the temporary absence program (TAP) co-ordinator about obtaining a daily pass so that he could try to find a job. A daily TA pass allows suitable inmates to be absent during the day from an institution to go to work or school, or for special reasons such as a crisis at home or an appointment with a medical specialist.

Rick would have to return to the institution after work and stay there on weekends. But his wife was expecting their first baby and he wanted to be able to provide for his family.

COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTRES

The TAP co-ordinator suggested that Rick apply for a transfer to a community resource centre (CRC). So far, he had behaved responsibly during his sentence and he had never been involved in any trouble with either staff or inmates.

CRCs are generally large houses that have been renovated to suit the needs of group living. They are operated by local, non-profit agencies and are funded by the ministry of correctional services. They usually have from 14 to 18 beds, and all the residents are

required to work, attend school, or be involved in an active job search.

Once Rick got a job he would be given guidance by the CRC staff on money management - how much of his salary he would have to give his wife, how much he should allow for his own expenses, and how much should be put away for savings until his release.

Although Rick would be living in a CRC, he would still be ultimately responsible to the correctional centre. If he violated any of the house rules, he could be sent back to the correctional centre if the CRC director felt it was necessary.

Convinced that living in a CRC would be beneficial to him, Rick completed his application. He was nervous as he stood before the TAP committee at the institution a few days later.

He answered questions about his future plans, such as whether or not he intended to work or go to school, his relationship with his family, and what he felt he would gain if he spent the rest of his sentence in a CRC.

The committee was satisfied with Rick's application and interview. A community investigation in which ministry staff had talked with the sentencing judge, police, and Rick's friends about Rick revealed that he was a potential candidate for the program.

The committee's recommendation to allow Rick to be transferred to a CRC was given final approval by the institution's superintendent and Rick was transferred the following week.

LEARNING THE RULES

His first evening at the centre was spent learning the many rules of the house. There could be no alcohol or drugs. Residents were expected to make their beds every day and carry out assigned daily household chores.

Rick could earn leisure passes that allowed him time outside the CRC for organized recreational activities. Most of all he wanted passes to be with his family. In about two weeks he would be able to apply for a pass that would allow him to spend a weekend at home.

But the passes were not issued as a reward for simply staying out of trouble. Rick knew that his general attitude and behavior would be monitored daily by staff and that this would be the

determining factor for granting or restricting any privileges and passes.

If he maintained a good attitude and behaved in a responsible manner at all times, Rick could become eligible for parole after serving one-third of his sentence which, in his case, amounted to three months. That meant he could serve the last months of his sentence in the community under the supervision of a parole officer. He would be able to live at home, but would have to report to the officer at least once a month. If Rick wanted to change jobs or his address, he would have to report his intentions to do so to the parole officer.

CRCs OFFER HELPFUL PROGRAMS

Rick found that the life skills courses and individual counseling offered by CRC staff during his first couple of weeks helped in his job search. He continued to attend AA meetings in the community and was convinced that he could finally cure his drinking problem. With encouragement from staff, Rick began to give swimming lessons as a volunteer at the neighborhood YMCA. Other free evenings were spent watching television, reading, playing cards with the other residents, or out on a pass.

The CRC director and staff were always willing to offer advice and to help him in any way they could, such as in finding a job, in managing his money, or in coping with personal problems.

Rick began to feel more confident in himself.

Despite the restrictions, the atmosphere in the CRC was much more relaxed than it had been in the correctional centre. It was like a real home. Because the residents had a certain amount of freedom, the hostility which always seemed present in the institution was not felt at the CRC.

Rick got along well with both the residents and staff. Living in the CRC was helping him to develop into a more responsible person and Rick felt that with counseling he would be able to establish a stable work pattern. Weekly house meetings with staff and residents offered all the residents the chance to discuss their problems, and helped Rick to talk openly to others.

Rick finally felt that he was on the road to a better, more productive life.